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BYRON'S MALACH HAMOVES

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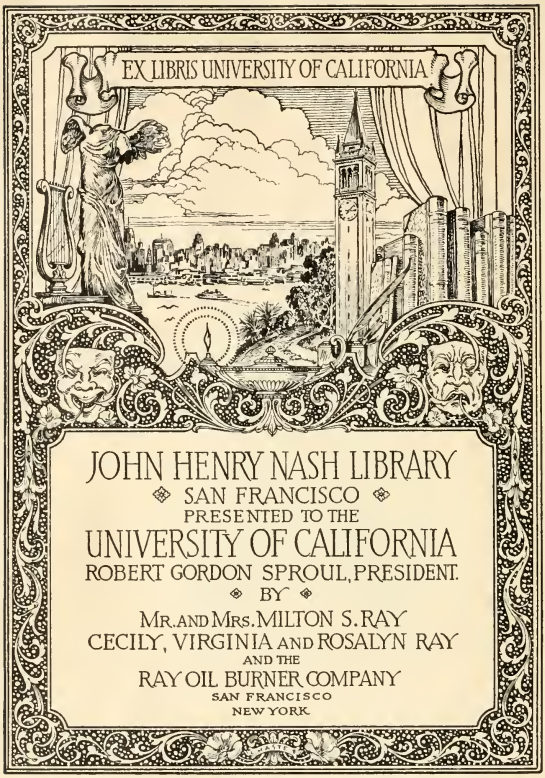
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BYRON'S MALACH HAMOVES

BYRON'S MALACH HAMOVES

By Henry H. Harper

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BYRON'S MALACH HAMOVES

By Henry H. Harper

"You know what ills the author's life assail,
Toil, envy, want, the patron and the jail."

The lives and reputations of most literary geniuses have been more or less haunted by a species of evil spirits and trouble-makers who, inspired by jealousy, acrimony, or an unworldly purity of mind, or some other incentive, are ever ready to cry down the characters of others, especially those above them. Indeed there was a time when certain anonymous scribblers earned their livelihood at this vocation, and persons who were capable of earning but a few shillings a week were given space in the magazines to rail at men of genius. Most of these had the decency, when a man died, to let his remains rest in peace; yet there were some who after a man had been hounded into his grave continued loudly to bark their anathemas over

his tombstone. It is the work of one of this latter type that we are now to consider.

Byron lived in an age prolific of literary genius and so-called literary critics, and both he and Shelley — the greatest poetic geniuses of their generation — were actually driven into exile in a foreign land by the immoderate criticism and obloquy heaped upon them by persons who were as incapable of understanding their true characters as they were of appreciating their works. By a singular coincidence Byron and Shelley both migrated to the same place in Italy, and by another strange similarity of experience, they were both roundly censured in their own country for their manner of conducting their unhappy matrimonial affairs, — matters with which the virtuous-minded critics appeared to be far more conversant than they were with the quality of their poetry. Which would seem to prove that what is called poetic license may be invoked only in literary — not domestic — discords. There are still certain persons who imagine that Byron's *Don Juan* fairly reeks with the taint of liquor and immorality, because — long before he wrote it — he was said to have imbibed too freely at times

and had improper relations with women. His poetry, however, according to his own declaration, was intended as a satire on these abuses, not as a condonation or encouragement of them. Even in the present enlightened age most of us who have not studied the unprejudiced biographies of these two men have a sort of misty notion that their standard of morals was far below that of their writings, — a notion derived largely from slanderous and highly fictitious statements, which like ancient mythologies have by oft repetition and lapse of time become more or less colored with popular credence.

Poetry, like water, does not rise above its source; and although a spring's pure waters may be polluted by vandals and thus be used to bring it into ill repute, those who take the pains to examine the source will find it uncorrupted. It is likewise possible to distort the meaning of a poet's utterances, however well intentioned they may be, and by turning his own words against him in support of some hypothetical charge it becomes an easy matter to induce the general public to think ill of him when the accusations go undenied and only one side of the

case is heard. Byron wrote to a friend: "You say I never attempt to justify myself. You are right. At times I can't, and occasionally I wont, defend by explanation; life is not worth having on such terms. The only attempt I ever made at defence was in a poetical point of view — and what did it end in? not an exculpation of me, but an attack on all other persons whatsoever. I should make a pretty scene indeed if I went on defending — besides, by proving myself (supposing it possible) a good sort of quiet country gentleman, to how many people should I give more pain than pleasure? Do you think accusors like one the better for being confuted?"

Both Byron and Shelley were maliciously misinterpreted, misquoted, misunderstood, and maltreated by their contemporaries. Like the prophets of old, they were without honor in their own country; indeed they were branded as moral lepers and demonic teachers by a class of people who were as much their moral inferiors as they were beneath them in worldly station and mental caliber. It is doubtful if any age has produced a more unselfish, pure-minded, unobtrusive poet than Shelley; yet

history records no instance of a writer charged with more corrupt morals than were imputed to him, — unless it be in the case of Byron. It is not surprising that they both became disgusted with the land of their birth; which, however, was proud to claim them after their death. From Italy Byron wrote to his publisher: "I trust they wont think of 'pickling and bringing me home to Clod or Blunderbuss Hall.' I am sure my bones would not rest in an English grave, or my clay mix with the earth of that country. I believe the thought would drive me mad on my deathbed, could I suppose that any of my friends would be base enough to convey my carcass back to your soil."

Perhaps no poet of ancient or modern times was ever lionized more than Byron was for a short period, when he was pampered by the obsequious homage of London's most fashionable set; and certainly no marble image ever got a harder tumble than he did, after he became entangled in his unhappy marital relations. But as a sheep goes to the slaughter with its lips sealed, so he took his own blame and that of others all upon himself and went quietly away, broken-hearted and alone, to a

strange land, followed by the jeers and sneers of the multitude, who interpreted his silence as evidence of his guilt. Little wonder that a man suffering his torments should have sought to assuage them by plunging into conviviality with a fast set, as he did for a short time at Venice. But he soon emerged, better and stronger than ever, and thereafter he produced his greatest literary work.

It would, of course, be superfluous to write a defense of Byron in the present age. His name has long since become a household word, not because he or his parents were famous or infamous, but because of the merit of the works he left to posterity. It would also be bad form at this late day to malign Byron's post mortuary detracter, Leigh Hunt; for when a man dies he should automatically become immune from personal attack. Not so, however, with the writings that he leaves to the world; they live after him and are at all times as susceptible to review as the character of their author was while alive. A wrong formula is not righted by the lapse of time; and a wrong impression is always subject to being corrected. An evil germ does not gain license of desirability by its

antiquity, and although it may lie dormant for a while, it may be resurrected and become harmful at any time.

Leigh Hunt's book, entitled *Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries,* is in substance a wrong formula; it creates, or was intended to create, an erroneous impression; therefore it is subject to analysis and discussion even though it is at present dormant and practically unknown to the general reader. Besides, it is more or less of a literary curiosity, and this being the age of curios, it would be worth noticing from that standpoint alone. The volume also affords an interesting metaphysical study; it illustrates how a man with some talent and reputation can become so stultified by prejudice and egotism as to lose all sense of perspective in judging the writings or acts of others; it shows how accurately a man may mirror his own vices and pettiness in attempting to traduce the character of another; how possible it is for an educated man to become so narrow and so malignant that in attempting by foul means to abuse another greater than himself he provokes contempt for himself and genuine admiration for the one attacked; and it proves

the truthfulness of the saying that the more you do for others of a certain type, the more you are slandered and held in contempt by the very persons you seek to help. It sustains the theory that undue familiarity with persons beneath your station and intellect encourages them to regard themselves not merely as your equals, but as your superiors. It recalls the story of the kind-hearted boy who on finding a reptile, stiff with cold, took it home and warmed it before the fire, after which it bit him and killed him.

Such literature is injurious, in that it presents a striking example of ingratitude that might well cause charitably disposed persons to become wary of helping really worthy people who are in need; it dries up the milk of human kindness.

It is said that the good that men do lives after them; it is equally true that the harm that men do lives after them, especially if it be left in book form. It would be almost as bad taste now to attack Hunt himself as it was for him to attack Byron after he was dead; but it would not be improper to point out the iniquitous or harmful qualities of the writings of Hunt, or

of any one else, since they are amenable to no statute of limitation. If, for example, every copy of Hunt's book, including his manuscript, had been buried with him, there could be no excuse for digging them up; but this is not true.

The author's preface to the second edition of *Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries* fairly bristles with invective against the "liars," "dogs," "canting rogues," "cowards," "hypocrites," "born slaves," "calumniators," "shallow fellows," and "knaves" who, prompted by a sense of common decency and justice, had been stirred to resentfulness by the contents of his pages on Byron. From this tirade the reader passes on to what promises to be a highly seasoned repast which the elusive preface seems to foreshadow. It is so worded as to lead one to suspect that it is the portal to a veritable feast of scandal and revelation, to be read only in the secret of one's chamber; but the anticipated feast dwindles into a mess of bones, devoid of meat or marrow.

Hunt says, among other things, that he had been told that his book "should put an end to a great deal of false biography." It doubtless

did, for when he got through there was but little left in that line to be added by any one else. He says that had he been rich enough to repay the handsome advances of his publisher, his "first impulse on finishing the work would have been to put it into the fire." The Judas of old is also said to have faltered before he finally decided to betray his Master; but his lust for gold smothered his better impulses.

As to Hunt's own biography, or rather autobiography, which was printed in the second volume, he says: "I soon became tired of that"—a remark which has doubtless been heartily applauded by most of those who have attempted to read it. He says he should have made it longer, but was "warned off this ground as impossible." He confesses that in looking over his manuscript relating to Lord Byron he "involuntarily felt an access of the spleen and indignation," which he experienced, "as a man who felt himself ill-treated." His work therefore instead of assuming the dignity and fairness of a biographical study, becomes a clumsy vehicle weighted down with prejudice and malevolence, supplemented by the oft repeated insinuation that he had "not told all;

for I have no right to do so," he says. There is a deal of grim truth in this remark. Had he *told all*, or rather, had he not deluded the sensuous reader into imagining himself constantly on the thin crust of some unsavory scandal, there would have been nothing to keep up the interest, for he related no facts but what every well informed reader already knew, and nothing else that anybody would care particularly about, even if true. With a vehemence that would do credit to a side-show crier, he reiterates over and over again that he speaks only the truth. He says he *loves* the truth "with a passion commensurate to what he thought its desirableness above all other things, for the security of good to the world." Indeed he loved it so much, and guarded it so jealously from the vulgar world, that he left it for the most part untold; especially that part which would have enabled the reader to attribute any morals or merits to the lifeless victim upon whose reputation and character he was performing his mental autopsy. And fearing lest some incredulous person might see through his designs, he adds a canting appendix to the second edition, intending thereby to forestall any further adverse criticism.

"I have told nothing but the truth," he says again; "but I am far from having told all the truth — and I never will tell it all. Common humanity would not let me. But I warn them [his critics] how, upon a better acquaintance with the work they renew the same kind of attacks; as in that case, I shall be compelled to let the public see not only the whole amount of what I have to object to on my own part, but what their pretended hero thought and said of them on his. And this, if they insist upon it, it will only be less easy for me to do, than it is to spare them in the meantime."

He evidently yielded to the pressure and decided not to spare the community, for he inserted a footnote containing the following letter from Byron to Shelley, which he prefaced with the remark that it will "furnish a subject of pleasing doubt to the public whether to admire such cavalier treatment of them or not:"

The only literary news I have heard of the plays (contrary to your friendly augury), is that the Edinburgh Review has attacked them all three — as well as it could. I have not seen the article. Murray writes discouragingly, and says that nothing published this year has made the least impression, including, I pre-

sume, what he has published on my account also. You see what it is to throw pearls to swine. — As long as I wrote the exaggerated nonsense which has corrupted the public taste, they applauded to the very echo; and now that I have composed within these three or four years some things which should "not willingly be let die," the whole herd snort and grumble, and return to wallow in their mire. However, it is fit I should pay the penalty of spoiling them, as no man has contributed more than me in my earlier compositions to produce that exaggerated and false style. It is a fit retribution that any really classical production should be received as these plays have been treated.

Doubtless Byron — who had once been a popular idol — intended merely to condole with Shelley, who was then having great difficulty in arousing any public interest in his work, in which Byron saw genuine merit; and if Hunt expected — as no doubt he did — to detract from Byron's fame by printing this friendly personal letter, it was a foolish illusion. It is doubtful if Mrs. Shelley would have loaned this letter to Hunt if she had known what use he intended to make of it.

Hunt, with his line of reasoning, would perhaps have regarded the following letter from

Byron to his publisher as a choice morsel, if he could have got hold of it to make use of:

So you and Mr. Foscolo want me to undertake what you call a "great work?" — an epic poem, I suppose, or some such pyramid. I'll try no such thing; I hate tasks. And then, "seven or eight years!" God send us all well this day three months, let alone years. If one's years can't be better employed than in sweating poesy, a man had better be a ditcher. . . As to the estimation of the English which you talk of, let them calculate what it is worth before they insult me with their insolent condescension.

I have not written for their pleasure. If they are pleased, it is that they chose to be so; I have never flattered their opinions, nor their pride; nor will I. Neither will I make "Ladies' books" "al dilettar le femine e la plebe." I have written from the fulness of my mind, from passion, from impulse, from many motives, but not for their "sweet voices."

I know the precise worth of popular applause, for few scribblers have had more of it; and if I chose to swerve into their paths, I could retain it, or resume it. But I neither love ye nor fear ye; and though I buy with ye, and sell with ye, and talk with ye, I will neither eat with ye, drink with ye, nor pray with ye. They made me, without my search, a species of popular idol; they, without reason or judgment, beyond the caprice of their good pleasure, threw down the image from its pedestal; it was not broken with the fall, and

they would, it seems, again replace it, — but they shall not.

Here is another characteristic letter written by Byron while in Italy to his publisher — one that Hunt probably never saw:

You are right, Gifford is right, Crabbe is right, Hobhouse is right — you are all right, and I am all wrong; but do, pray, let me have that pleasure. Cut me up root and branch; quarter me in the Quarterly; send round my "disjecti membra poetæ," like those of the Levite's concubine; make me, if you will, a spectacle to men and angels; but don't ask me to alter, for I won't: — I am obstinate and lazy — and there's the truth.

But, nevertheless, I will answer your friend Palgrave, who objects to the quick succession of fun and gravity, as if in that case the gravity did not (in intention, at least) heighten the fun. His metaphor is, that "we are never scorched and drenched at the same time." Blessings on his experience! Ask him these questions about "scorching and drenching." Did he never play at cricket, or walk a mile in hot weather? Did he never spill a dish of tea over himself in handing the cup to his charmer, to the great shame of his nankeen breeches? Did he never swim in the sea at noonday with the sun in his eyes and on his head, which all the foam of ocean could not cool? Did he never draw his foot out of too hot water, damning his eyes and his valet's? Did he never tumble into a river or lake, fish-

ing, and sit in his wet clothes in the boat, or on the bank, afterwards, "scorched and drenched," like a true sportsman? "Oh for breath to utter!" — but make him my compliments; he is a clever fellow for all that — a very clever fellow.

Among Byron's shortcomings Hunt first accuses him of having a father who "was a rake of the wildest description," and a mother who was "a violent woman." Moreover, he had an inherited lameness in the form of "a shrunken foot, a little twisted." In describing Byron's features Hunt first admits that he was handsome, then goes on to depict him thus: "His jaw was too big for the upper part," and it "had all the wilfullness of a despot in it. The animal predominated over the intellectual part of the head, inasmuch as the face altogether was large in proportion to the skull. The eyes also were set too near one another, and the nose, though handsome in itself, had the appearance when you saw it closely in front, of being grafted on the face, rather than growing properly out of it."

This grotesque description, though intended to be serious, is of course nothing more than a crudely drawn caricature. It is in strange con-

tradiction to Mary Shelley's journal entry on Byron, wherein she writes: "Beauty sat on his countenance, and power beamed from his eye." His person, continues Hunt, "tended to fat and effeminancy." But we know that Byron was no namby-pamby ladies' man; he was a good swordsman, a crack pistol shot, a good boxer, a famous long-distance swimmer, and a good all around athlete. That he was no coward we may see by the following letter he wrote to Murray:

I have been in a rage these two days, and am still bilious therefrom. You shall hear. A captain of dragoons,——, Hanoverian by birth, in the Papal troops at present, whom I had obliged by a loan when nobody would lend him a paul, recommended a horse to me, on sale by a Lieutenant ——, an officer who unites the sale of cattle to the purchase of men. I bought it. The next day, on shoeing the horse, we discovered the *thrush* — the animal being warranted sound. I sent to reclaim the contract and the money. The lieutenant desired to speak with me in person. I consented. He came [to a public inn]. It was his own particular request. He began a story. I asked him if he would return the money. He said no — but he would exchange. He asked an exorbitant price for his other horses. I told him that he was a thief. He said he was an *officer* and a man of honour, and pulled out a

Parmesan passport signed by General Count Neipperg. I answered, that as he was an officer I would treat him as such; and that as to his being a gentleman, he might prove it by returning the money: as for his Parmesan passport, I should have valued it more if it had been a Parmesan cheese. He answered in high terms, and said that if it were the *morning* (it was about eight o'clock in the evening) he would have *satisfaction*. I then lost my temper: "As for THAT," I replied, "you shall have it directly, — it will be *mutual* satisfaction, I can assure you. You are a thief, and, as you say, an officer; my pistols are in the next room, loaded; take one of the candles, examine, and make your choice of weapons." He replied, that *pistols* were *English weapons; he* always fought with the *sword*. I told him that I was able to accommodate him, having three regimental swords in a drawer near us: and he might take the longest, and put himself on guard.

All this passed in the presence of a third person, He then said *No*; but tomorrow morning he would give me the meeting at any time or place. I answered that it was not usual to appoint meetings in the presence of witnesses, and that we had best speak man to man, and appoint time and instruments. But as the man present was leaving the room, the Lieutenant ——, before he could shut the door after him, ran out roaring "Help" and "murder" most lustily, and fell into a sort of hysteric in the arms of about fifty people, who all saw that I had no weapon of any sort or kind about me, and followed him, asking him what the devil

was the matter with him. Nothing would do; he ran away without his hat, which he never missed till he got to his hotel or inn, and went to bed, ill of the fright. He then tried his complaint at the police, which dismissed it as frivolous. He is, I believe, gone away, or going. . .

In his estimate of Byron, Hunt assures us that he is determined to be fair and sincere. "I shall remain so to my dying day!" he declares. But he appears to have lost sight of the fact that a man's literary genius is rated by his works, and not by his personal appearance or what some biased person may say about him. Byron was naturally sensitive about his deformed foot; and Hunt, evidently forgetting that he was prodding with a pen instead of a sword, sought out the most vulnerable spot in his victim's anatomy. That Byron's genius lay in his brain instead of in his crippled foot is a fact that escaped no one, except biographer Hunt. That his mother was a "violent woman" and hated him and called him a "lame brat" because he was physically deformed is nothing new or discreditable to him. To be unfortunate in the marriage relations (which Hunt also touches upon) is not necessarily a disgrace to a

man of genius or any one else. But to flaunt such matters publicly with no actual knowledge or explanation of the facts is indelicate and is sure to react upon the offender, rather than injure the one attacked. No one thinks the less of genius because it springs from misfortune or unhappy environment, or because it is belittled by persons who are too small to appreciate it. The following letter to Lady Byron — which is said never to have been sent — shows Byron in a different light from that in which Hunt attempted to paint him. It may be that the original was sent and Byron made this copy for himself, or else the original may have been returned to him unopened, as some of his letters were.

I have to acknowledge the receipt of "Ada's hair," which is very soft and pretty, and nearly as dark already as mine was at twelve years old, if I may judge from what I recollect of some in Augusta's possession, taken at that age. But it don't curl, — perhaps from its being let grow.

I also thank you for the inscription of the date and name, and I will tell you why; — I believe that they are the only two or three words of your hand-writing in my possession. For your letters I returned; and except the two words, or rather the one word, "House-

hold," written twice in an old account book, I have no other. I burnt your last note, for two reasons: — firstly, it was written in a style not very agreeable; and, secondly, I wished to take your word without documents, which are the worldly resources of suspicious people.

I suppose that this note will reach you somewhere about Ada's birthday — the 10th of December, I believe. She will then be six, so that in about twelve more I shall have some chance of meeting her; — perhaps sooner, if I am obliged to go to England by business or otherwise. Recollect, however, one thing, either in distance or nearness; — every day which keeps us asunder should, after so long a period, rather soften our mutual feelings, which must always have one rallying-point as long as our child exists, which I presume we both hope will be long after either of her parents.

The time which has elapsed since the separation has been considerably more than the whole brief period of our union, and the not much longer one of our prior acquaintance. We both made a bitter mistake; but now it is over, and irrevocably so. For, at thirty-three on my part, and a few years less on yours, though it is no very extended period of life, still it is one when the habits and thought are generally so formed as to admit of no modification; and as we could not agree when younger, we should with difficulty do so now.

I say all this, because I own to you, that, notwithstanding everything, I considered our re-union as not

impossible for more than a year after the separation; — but then I gave up the hope entirely and forever. But this very impossibility of re-union seems to me at least a reason why, on all the few points of discussion which can arise between us, we should preserve the courtesies of life, and as much of its kindness as people who are never to meet may preserve perhaps more easily than nearer connections. For my own part, I am violent, but not malignant; for only fresh provocations can awaken my resentments. To you, who are colder and more concentrated, I would just hint, that you may sometimes mistake the depth of a cold anger for dignity, and a worse feeling for duty. I assure you that I bear you *now* (whatever I may have done) no resentment whatever. Remember, that *if you have injured me* in aught, this forgiveness is something; and that, if I have *injured you*, it is something more still, if it be true, as the moralists say, that the most offending are the least forgiving.

Whether the offence has been solely on my side, or reciprocal, or on yours chiefly, I have ceased to reflect upon any but two things — viz., that you are the mother of my child, and that we shall never meet again. I think if you also consider the two corresponding points with reference to myself, it will be better for all three. Yours ever, NOEL BYRON.

While Hunt was in prison for having libeled the prince regent, Byron visited him frequently, says Hunt, "and used to bring books for my

Story of Rimini, which I was then writing. He would not let the footman bring them in; he would enter with a couple of quartos under his arm, and give you to understand that he was prouder of being a friend and a man of letters, than a Lord. It was thus that by flattering one's vanity he persuaded us of his own freedom from it." We can well understand how Hunt's vanity was flattered by such unaffected kindness from a nobleman and a man of letters, but we can less easily understand how after his good Samaritan was dead he could have tried to persuade his readers that he had any selfish or insincere motives in such friendly acts. He adds the spiteful remark that Byron's footman must have carried the books to the door.

On October 15, 1814, while Hunt was still in prison, Byron sent him a hare, a pheasant, and a brace of partridges, with a note expressing the hope that they were fresh; which they probably were, for Hunt makes no mention in his book that they were tainted. Byron closed his friendly note with the hope that Hunt's approaching freedom would find him "in full health to enjoy it." After Hunt's release from prison Byron urged him to go to the theatre

with him — a rather unusual compliment for an English nobleman to pay one of the middle class who was decidedly out of public favor. Byron was then in high favor and had nothing to gain from such friendship or association. Hunt admits that Byron often sent him complimentary theatre tickets and offered the use of his private box; but for these courteous favors he snarls back with the contemptuous remark that Byron "was one of a management that governed Drury Lane Theatre at that time, and made a sad business of their direction." He says that Lord Byron often called on him at his home, "and took a pleasure in my room, as contrasted with the splendour of his great house;" but "he had good reason to do so," says Hunt; "for his domestic troubles were just about to become public." Hunt, however, does not mention any other English nobleman or man of letters who sought out his congenial quarters as a rendezvous or as a panacea for family troubles "about to become public." He says that after the family disruption Byron became ill and much disconcerted; and that the public took sides with the lady, "as they ought to do." Of course the public "ought" to have taken the part of Lady

Byron, because Hunt said she liked one of his poems, which was perhaps more than the public did. It is a well known fact that Byron assumed the responsibility for the differences with his wife, and took upon himself the entire blame for the causes that led to the separation. In 1816 Byron wrote to Tom Moore: "Where there is blame, it belongs to myself; and, if I cannot redeem, I must bear it." But as a matter of fact they were wholly incompatible and the blame was about equally divided between the two, with Byron's mother-in-law acting in the rôle of chief trouble-maker.

On August 26, 1821, Shelley wrote to Hunt from Italy, saying that he had just rented the finest palace on the Lung'Arno for Byron, who offered to assist Hunt in establishing a periodical in Italy, and to "restore your shattered health and spirits by a migration to these 'regions mild of calm and serene air.'" Hunt lost no time in accepting this flattering offer, and with the two hundred pound loan he received from Byron he took his whole family, consisting of a wife and six small children, to Italy. There appears to have been nothing in Shelley's invitation that included all the family. He

wrote Hunt to "put his music and his books on board a vessel and come;" but he did not say to put the whole family aboard. Immediately after the Hunts arrived in Italy, Shelley was drowned; this left them stranded in a strange country, without money or shelter. Lord Byron came at once to their assistance and invited them all to his palace, where he gave them the entire lower floor. For a man of Byron's station and temperament to quarter such a horde in his own home is a species of generosity and human kindness rarely met with in any age. But the dependent Hunt thus records his appreciation: "When I got there I found the hottest looking house I ever saw. Not content with having a red wash over it, the red was the most unseasonable of all reds, a salmon color. Think of this, flaring over the country in a hot Italian sun!" he exclaims. He says that "everything was new, foreign and violent." Also that the splendor of great mansions begins upstairs, "where the house is occupied by only one family, . . . unless they descend for coolness in summertime," implying that Byron and his household had better quarters than he and his family had! Although in hot weather

they were content to swelter upstairs while Hunt reposed comfortably in the cool lower quarters. He grudgingly admits that the furniture in this grand villa — which was of marble and is said to have been built in part by Michael Angelo — was "good and respectable." He also admits that when his apartments were fitted up, "Lord Byron insisted upon making us a present of the goods himself." But he attempts to disparage Byron's generosity by asserting that he (Byron) held Shelley's bond for the two hundred pounds[1] he received; although he discreetly avoids mentioning the fact that Byron very magnanimously refused to accept the amount from Shelley's estate. He does not, however, claim that any part of the sum was ever returned to Byron, Shelley, or anyone else, or that he ever had any intention of returning it.

When Mrs. Hunt arrived at Byron's house she was ill, and he immediately called in the celebrated Vacca, the most renowned physician

[1] In a letter dated February 6, 1822, from Byron to his financial agent in London, he said that he had loaned Hunt two hundred and fifty pounds. This, moreover, was at a time when Byron, although living in good style, was hard pressed and was paying his creditors off by instalments.

in Italy, who doubtless charged Byron a liberal fee for his attendance. Hunt does not mention this among his many other forgotten gratuities; but he does *not* forget to remark that although this physician thought Mrs. Hunt "would not survive beyond the year," she survived *him* by many years.

"Stern necessity and a large family," says Hunt, "compelled me," when he tells of accepting Byron's gratuities; consequently it seems to have been this "stern necessity," and what he regarded as Byron's mental, moral and physical shortcomings, that absolved him from every obligation, robbed him of every decent sense of honor, and entitled him to launch his vicious attack upon the character and habits of the best friend he ever had. Having profited handsomely by his munificence while alive, he also profited pecuniarily by slandering him after his death, and selling the manuscript to a publisher who catered to the appetites of a class who are always hungry for any scandal or supposed weaknesses in the lives of great men.

Hunt says that he has "some peculiar notions on the subject of money." His work testifies that he also had some peculiar notions on the

subject of gratitude and integrity. In all his tirade against Byron he does not prove a single fault or weakness, except by unsupported assertions; and even these, if true, could not be construed by any fair-minded person as discreditable to Byron or his genius. That Byron, in common with most great genuises, had his faults and foibles, is an acknowledged fact; but they were not such as Hunt in his capacity of alms-taker could discover or prove; therefore when called to task by his critics he sought his justification under the shelter of innuendos — that he knew a great deal more than he could tell, leading the unwary reader to imagine that it was his sense of *decency* that restrained him.

The text of Hunt's book is suffused with "Good Gods!" but like the preface, these startling expletives are neither preceded nor followed by any disclosures that arouse one's emotions to any such violent pitch as those indulged in by the author himself. Much of the volume is devoted to denying the "falsehoods" of other biographers, most of whom, Hunt assumes, were not merely mistaken or misinformed; they simply lied, intentionally, gratuitously, persistently. After devoting a

great deal of space to specific refutations of statements made by one biographer, he disposes of all the others *en bloc* by saying that "in contradicting this one I contradict twenty others, the scandalous ones included." The others are therefore all misleading and incomplete, and to him fell the great unfinished task of revealing Byron in his true darkness before the world! This revelation consists chiefly in telling that he was physically deformed and mentally deficient; that he craved admiration, and was envious and jealous of the fame of other writers;[1] that he was subject to weak impulses; that he had no voice, no address, no sense of humor; that he disliked the English climate, disliked the manners of the people, and "did not think them a bit better than other nations;" — which latter fact must have given a tremendous shock to Hunt's patriotic zeal. Although the English

[1] The groundlesness of Hunt's charge of jealousy becomes obvious in the light of Byron's own words relating to an author's fame:

"What does it signify who is before or behind in a race where there is no *goal*? The temple of fame is like that of the Persians, — the universe; our altar, the tops of the mountains. I should be equally content with Mount Caucasus, or Mount Anything; and those who like it, may have Mount Blanc or Chimbrorazo, without my envy of their elevation."

people had jailed him for printing his exotic views and slandering the prince regent he was glad enough to return to them when he found it impossible to earn a living elsewhere. Furthermore, he declares that Byron was "perverse and self-willed;" he "had a false opinion of human nature;" he "thrust out his chin and gave self-estimating nods of the head;" that he "was not a generous man, and in what he did he contrived to blow a trumpet or to see that others blew one for him." The trumpet blast that Hunt blew for him was indeed a discordant dirge; he out-slandered all the other slanderers of his time, and even denounced those who grudgingly admitted that Byron was a genius. He declared that Lord Byron was "too much admired by the public because he was sulky and wilful;" that women fell in love with him, "though he could not return their passion;" that "there was coarseness in the way in which he would talk to women;" that "he painted his heroes criminal, wilful, even selfish, in great things; but he took good care not to paint them mean in little ones.[1] He took care also to give

[1] Here Hunt exhibits not only a cantankerous nature, but a lack of understanding. In 1822 Byron wrote to Murray, his

them a great quantity of what he was singularly deficient in, — which was self-possession; for when it is added that he had no address, even in the ordinary sense of the word, — that he hummed and hawed, and looked confused, on very trivial occasions, — that he could much more easily get into a dilemma than out of it, and with much greater skill wound the self-love of others than relieve them, — the most commonplace believers in a poet's attractions will begin to suspect that it is possible for his books

publisher, regarding a review of *Don Juan*: "As I take the good in good part I must not, nor will not, quarrel with the bad. What the writer says of *Don Juan* is harsh, but is inevitable. . . *Don Juan* will be known by-and-by for what it is intended — a *Satire* on *abuses* of the present states of society, and not an eulogy of vice." Another passage from the same letter affords an interesting proof of Byron's fair-mindedness and generosity, which were amply bestowed, and so ill-received by Hunt.

"Now, do you see what you and your friends do by your injudicious rudeness? — actually cement a sort of connection which you strove to prevent, and which, had the Hunts *prospered*, would not in all probability have continued. As it is, I will not quit them in their adversity, though it should cost me character, fame, money, and the usual *et cetera*.

"My original motives I already explained (in the letter which you thought proper to show): they are the *true* ones, and I abide by them, as I tell you, and I told Leigh Hunt when he questioned me on the subject of that letter. He was violently hurt, and never will forgive me at bottom; but I can't

to be the best part of him." Following this line of reasoning it would be poor consolation for those who think well of Hunt if they should consider that his libel on Lord Byron represented the best part of him.

It would require a wide stretch of the imagination to conceive of a man of Byron's stamp humming and hawing and looking confused over trivial matters in the presence of the man who wrote the following childish comment on his *Don Juan*: "I will here observe that he had no plan with regard to the poem; that he did not know how long he should make it, nor what he should do with his hero." But Hunt entertained no such mean idea of his own poetry,

help that. I never meant to make a parade of it; but if he chose to question me, I could only answer the plain truth: and I confess I did not see anything in the letter to hurt him, unless I said he was '*a bore*,' which I don't remember. Had their Journal gone on well, and I could have aided to make it better for them, I should then have left them, after my safe pilotage off a lee shore, to make a prosperous voyage by themselves. As it is, I can't, and would not, if I could, leave them among the breakers.

"As to any community of feeling, thought, or opinion between Leigh Hunt and me, there is little or none. We meet rarely, hardly ever; but I think him a good-principled and able man, and must do as I would be done by. I do not know what world he has lived in, but I have lived in three or four. . ."

which he thought superior to that of Byron or Shelley. He also remarks that the hats of both Byron and Shelley were so small that he could not get either of them on his head.

Another of Byron's many shortcomings was that Hunt's wife did not take a fancy to him; also that his small boys did not like him. Hunt relates with much apparent glee that on one occasion Mrs. Hunt by her wit "completely dashed and reduced Byron to silence." One day, while the Hunts were living on Lord Byron, he said to Mrs. Hunt: "What do you think, Mrs. Hunt? Trelawny has been speaking against my morals! What do you think of that!"

"It is the first time," said Mrs. Hunt, "I ever heard of them."

"This," says Hunt in reporting the conversation, "which would have set a man of address upon his wit, completely dashed, and reduced him to silence." So much for Mrs. Hunt. On the next page Hunt relates that Byron once commented on some of his (Hunt's) friends, "affecting to be very pleasant and good natured, and without any 'offense in the world.' All this provoked me to mortify him; and I

asked if he knew what Mrs. Hunt had said one day to the Shelleys of his picture by Harlowe? . . . He said he did not, and was curious to know. An engraving of it, I told him, was shown her, and her opinion asked; upon which she observed that it 'resembled a great schoolboy who had a plain bun given him, instead of a plum one.' . . He looked as blank as possible, and never again criticised the personal appearance of those whom I regarded." That Byron was "completely dashed" by Mrs. Hunt's remark, and looked "as blank as possible" at Hunt for such asininity, is easily believable. That he calmly accepted Mrs. Hunt's insulting and uncalled-for reply to his jovial remark, showed his tolerance and good manners, which Hunt mistook for want of address; and that he did not forthwith turn them all out of his house for their impudence, is an indisputable proof of his great forbearance and charity. If we add to these galling impertinences the annoyance of having a family of six unrestrained children romping and screeching about the house and premises it will be seen that Byron's patience alone was enough to make him famous. Mrs. Marshall observed that Hunt's children were

allowed "to do exactly as they chose." And Byron in writing to Mrs. Shelley about a piece of Shelley's furniture that was in his house, said: "I have a particular dislike to anything of Shelley's being within the same walls with Mrs. Hunt's children. They are dirtier and more mischievous than Yahoos. What they can't destroy with their filth they will with their fingers." After rhapsodizing over the quietude, tractableness and "self-possession" of his own children, Hunt says that they were "nothing daunted" by his Lordship's presence. He says that his eldest boy surprised Byron "with his address, never losing his singleness of manner;" and that in Byron's presence the boy's dignified bearing and easy manner made him appear "as if he had always lived in the world instead of out of it." This, Hunt says, put Byron completely "out of his reckoning." We may wonder that they did not also put him out of his mind. Doubtless Hunt's children were as good as any other children would have been, neglected as they necessarily were, but this affords no reason why Byron should be condemned because he did not want them annoying him and despoiling his house and premises.

Hunt seems to imply that he was doing Byron a very great service in accepting his friendship and gratuities, for in this connection he remarks: "I had declined, out of a notion of principle, to avail myself of more than one opportunity of being intimate with men of rank; opportunities which, it will be easily conceived, are no very uncommon thing in the life of a journalist. I confess that I valued myself a little suspiciously upon my self denial." He complains that Byron used to sit up very late at night and write on his *Don Juan*. But as to that, it is not surprising that he should resort to the night hours for concentration, since the clamor down stairs in the daytime was probably not conducive to poetic thoughts. Hunt also declares that Byron wrote *Don Juan* "under the influence of gin and water,"—a compound which, if Hunt could have got hold of, might have made him better known. He says he could have been included as one of the characters in *Don Juan*, but he declined the honor. He tells us that after working until late at night, Byron used to get up late in the morning and lounge about, occasionally singing an air "in a swaggering style." It is not made quite

clear how Byron accomplished the feat of singing in a swaggering style, but Hunt says he did it in "a voice small and veiled." Indeed everything about Byron appears small, if we accept Hunt's measurements. Whatever he did or said or looked was suspicuously construed as a fault or device. If he wrote well it was under the artificial stimulus of "gin and water," or in obedience to some base motive; if he sang, it was with a bad voice; if he walked, it was with a limp; if he joked or laughed, his jokes were bad and his laughter unnatural; if he smiled and looked pleased, it was to deceive you and hide his real feelings; if he gave you money, it was to humiliate you; if he did you any other service, it was to subject you and show his superiority over you.[1]

It is said that a drunken man imagines everyone else is drunk but himself; that a treacher-

[1] On the day Mrs. Shelly learned of Byron's death she wrote in her journal: "Can I forget our evening visits to Diodati? — our excursions on the lake, when he sang the Tyrolese Hymn, and his voice was harmonized with the winds and waves? Can I forget his attentions and consolations to me during my deepest misery? Never! His faults being, for the most part, weaknesses, induced one readily to pardon them." Mrs. Shelley, who had an excellent ear for music, appears to have thought better of Byron's voice than Hunt did.

ous person is always skeptical of others; and that a suspicious person who is constantly imputing selfish or dishonest motives to others, is not to be trusted. Hunt, however, puts himself above any such imputations, for we have his oft repeated assurance that he tells the truth, and nothing but the truth. He loved it, he said; he adored it. But after reading some of his dubious, erratic statements, one is inclined to wonder if he may not have sometimes reasoned after the manner of the little girl, who having been caught prevaricating after promising to tell the truth, exclaimed,—"Oh, but I didn't cross my heart and hope to drop dead on the spot!" Neither did Hunt, so far as we know. He says that he often differed with Byron, but seldom argued, because "his Lordship was so poor a logician that he did not even provoke argument." But notwithstanding Hunt's opinion of Byron, it is worthy of note that Shelley thought well enough of him to make him the executor of his will; and this is obviously more than he thought of Hunt, who regarded himself as Shelley's closest friend. It appears that Byron frequently provoked Hunt because he declined to argue with him on trivial

points, and to avoid needless controversy he oftentimes appeared to be easily convinced. This exasperated Hunt, who seems to have had a liberal supply of long-distance argumentative ammunition, and like a true sportsman he thought it was more creditable to land a buck at long range than to shoot a calf tied to a stake in the garden. He simply mistook the cleverness of Byron's ready acquiescence for sheer stupidity. Which reminds us that there is nothing more disconcerting to an inveterate scold than for the object upon which it is venting its spleen to turn and walk away, or to assume an attitude of docile indifference.

Hunt tells us that Byron clung to the privileges of his rank; that he had only a small library; that Bayle and Gibbon supplied him with his chief learning; that being a graceful rider he liked to be told of it; that he knew little of art or music — all of which could be true of any man without exciting the contempt of posterity. But when he says that the Countess Guiccioli did not care much for Byron, that he had no heart for anything but a feverish notoriety, and that he was a *miser*, he creates a record of palpable untruth which must have been no

less obvious to him than it is to others. We have Shelley for authority that Byron gave one-quarter or more of his entire income to aid the poor; and his charities were without ostentation. While in England, and at a time when he was so destitute that he "could not command one hundred and fifty pounds" he sent Coleridge — whom he scarcely knew — a voluntary gift of one hundred pounds to relieve him from distress.

Hunt did not even like Byron's friends, who he says were "nothing superior to their birth. . . . They were almost all persons of humble origin; one of a race of booksellers; another the son of a grocer; another, of a glazier; and a fourth, though the son of a Baronet, the grandson of a linen draper."[1] With himself, however, Hunt had no fault to find. "As to my birth," he adds, "the reader may see what it was in another part of the volume; and my

[1] It seems queer that Hunt should have made this scornful reference to Shelley, whom he always regarded so highly. In his great enthusiasm his pen must have slipped. But still, Shelley was dead; therefore, like Byron, was of no more use to him. Furthermore, he had neglected to mention Hunt in his will. Hunt afterwards succeeded in persuading Mrs. Shelley that this was an oversight, which she corrected by granting him an annuity from Shelley's estate.

manners I leave him to construe, kindly or otherwise, according to his own." Whatever Hunt or his readers may have thought of his birth and his manners, it is at least interesting to know what the *Quarterly Review* thought of them, even before he exposed himself so boldly in his traitorous article on Byron. The following extract from the *Quarterly Review* refers to Hunt's dedication of one of his poems to Byron, sometime before either of them went to Italy: "We never, in so few lines, saw so many clear marks of vulgar impatience of a low man, conscious and ashamed of his wretched vanity, and labouring, with coarse flippancy, to scramble over the bounds of birth and education, and fidget himself into the *stout-heartedness* of being familiar with a Lord." — Vol. xiv, p. 481.

Hunt also attempted to arouse the prejudice of Americans against Byron by declaring that he spoke ill of them and called them a piggish lot of money-grabbers; but it is not at all likely that he ever said or thought anything of the kind; for just before Hunt's arrival in Italy Byron was entertained by Commodore John Paul Jones aboard the flagship of the American squadron then lying off the coast of Italy, and

in his account of the reception, written to a friend in England, he spoke in the highest terms of both the officers and men. He said that he was presented with a bound copy of a beautiful American edition of his poems, which affected him very deeply; also that when he was leaving the ship one of the ladies asked him for the rose he was wearing in his buttonhole, that she might take it back to America as a memento. He immediately complied by taking off the rose and giving it to her, and said he felt highly honored by the request. He was so impressed by the reception and by the sympathies of the American people that for a time he thought seriously of coming here to live.

Hunt says that he used to repeat the following "laughable passages" (he calls them) to Byron, who "hardly seemed to relish them:"

Once at our house, amidst our Attic feasts,
We liken'd our acquaintances to beasts;
As for example — some to calves and hogs,
And some to bears and monkeys, cats and dogs.

We said (which charm'd the Doctor much, no doubt),
His mind was like, of elephants the snout;
That could pick pins up, yet possess'd the vigour
Of trimming well the jacket of a tiger.

When Johnson was in Edinburgh, my wife,
To please his palate, studied for her life;
With ev'ry rarity she fill'd her house,
And gave the Doctor, for his dinner, *grouse.*

Dear Doctor Johnson left off drinks fermented,
With quarts of chocolate and cream contented;
Yet often down his throat's prodigious gutter,
Poor man! he pour'd whole floods of melted butter.

"At these passages," says Hunt, "which make me laugh so for the thousandth time that I can hardly write them, Lord Byron had too invincible relish for a good thing not to laugh also; but he did it uneasily." That Byron did not fall into paroxyms of laughter with Hunt at such silly doggerel commends rather than discredits his sense of humor. Probably the apparent *uneasiness* of his laughter was because he was laughing *at* Hunt instead of *with* him.

One of the most persistent claims put forward by Hunt was that Byron was petulant and writhed under adverse criticism; that all who disagreed with him or his writings became subjects of his scorn and ridicule. On this point we quote the following letter which Byron wrote to Hunt, who printed it in the back of his

book. It belied much that he had said of Byron, but the beautiful enconiums that the great bard here heaped upon him afforded too good a personal advertisement to be lost. As a matter of fact, few authors have accepted criticism with more toleration and better spirit than Byron did:

Feb. 9, 1814.

My dear Sir:

I have been snow-bound and thaw-swamped (two compound epithets for you) in the "valley of the shadow" of Newstead Abbey for nearly a month, and have not been four hours returned to London. Nearly the first use I make of my benumbed fingers, is to thank you for your very handsome note in the volume you have just put forth; only, I trust, to be followed by others on subjects more worthy your notice than the works of contemporaries. Of myself, you speak only too highly — and you must think me strangely spoiled, or perversely peevish, even to suspect that any remarks of yours, in the spirit of candid criticism, could possibly prove unpalatable. Had they been harsh, instead of being written as they are in the indelible ink of good sense and friendly admiration — had they been the harshest — as I knew and know that you are above any personal bias, at least *against* your fellow bards — believe me, they would not have caused a word of remonstrance nor a moment of rankling on my part. Your poem I read long ago in the "Reflector," and it is not

much to say it is the best *"session"* we have — and with a more difficult subject — for we are neither so good nor so bad (taking the best and worst) as the wits of the olden time.

To your smaller pieces, I have not yet had time to do justice by perusal — and I have a quantity of unanswered, and, I hope, unanswerable letters to wade through before I sleep; but to-morrow will see me through your volume. I have been regaled at every inn on the road by lampoons and other merry conceits on myself in the ministerial gazettes, occasioned by the republication of two stanzas inserted in 1812, in Perry's paper. The hysterics of the *Morning Post* are quite interesting; and I hear (but have not seen) of something terrific in a last week's *Courier* — all of which I take with "the calm indifference" of Sir Fretful Plagiary. The *Morning Post* has one copy of devices upon my deformity, which certainly will admit of no "historic doubts," like "Dickon my master's" — another upon my Atheism, which is not quite so clear — and another, very downrightly says I am the *devil* (*boiteux* [lame] they might have added), and a rebel and what not. . .

Ever your obliged and sincere, BYRON.

P. S. Since this letter was written, I have been at your text, which has much *good* humour in every sense of the word. Your notes are of a very high order indeed, particularly on Wordsworth.

The ribald text of Hunt's book supplies its own condemnation, and an impartial analysis

of the confused aggregation of facts and fallacies he sets forth furnishes the most indubitable proof of Byron's greatness, both as a poet and a man. If any further internal evidence be required to brand the volume as a piece of impertinent slander from beginning to end, it is furnished by the personal letters from Byron, which Hunt printed at the conclusion of his rambling diatribe. Every one of these is written in a spirit of manliness, gentleness and magnanimity. Most of them are filled with expressions of unstinted praise of some poem or other literary work that Hunt had sent him to read. In the whole twelve letters there is not a single trace of jealousy or testiness, which Hunt claims were among Byron's dominant characteristics. He went so far as to preface these letters with a few apologetic remarks concerning their friendly tenor, fearing lest they might belie what he had said before them — which they assuredly do. "Had I wished to flatter my vanity, or make a case out for myself," he says, "I might have published them long ago." He also adds, in his characteristic way (he appears always to have kept a trump card up his sleeve): "I have other letters in

my possession, written while Lord Byron was in Italy, and varying in degrees of cordiality, according to the mood he happened to be in. They are for the most part on matters of dispute between us, and are all written in an uneasy, factitious spirit." Strange that their factitiousness should have caused them all to be excluded from his book, if they would have proved what he failed to prove. But we may surmise that his real reason for omitting them was due to other considerations. Again, they perhaps lacked the salient qualities of praise. Hunt's purpose in printing the letters he did is only too obvious. In these Lord Byron had praised his work, and he was anxious to let the public know what the greatest poet of all England thought of *his* poems. In order that no personal glory might be lost, he supplied footnotes to enlighten the reader as to what piece it was that Byron referred to, if he failed to call it by name. He doubtless figured that they would dull the edge of his sword somewhat, but surely no one after reading what he had said about Byron could doubt that he had, chameleon like, changed his colors since writing these letters in years gone by. But no matter how

much Byron had changed for the worse his praise would of course hold good for all time.

Byron was gone, and could not be heard in his own defence, but his letters quoted herein speak for him, more eloquently than anything he could have added. Indeed if he had been living it is doubtful if he would have paid any more attention to Hunt's fretful harangue than he would to a fly buzzing and beating itself against the window pane in a distant part of the room. But this, after all, is a rather gratuitous speculation, for Hunt made sure that Byron was dead before he attacked him. Hunt said that he had reasons to believe "that the opinions he entertained of breeding and refinement puzzled Byron extremely." No doubt they did, and if Byron could have risen from his grave and read Hunt's memorial of him he would probably have been still more puzzled at the treachery of one whom he had befriended.

"Oh Truth!" cries Hunt from the depths of his agonized soul, as he aims another poisoned arrow at Byron's character, — "What scrapes of portraiture have you not got me into!" Truth has been falsely accused of many crimes, but to lay these *scraps* of portraiture at her door is

indeed a cruel arraignment. Hunt also records that a "fair friend" once said to him:

"Good heavens! If Byron had but foreseen that you would have given the world an account of him, what would he not have done to cut a figure in your eyes!" We might answer, that if he had been less charitable than his acts and his letters show him to have been he would probably have turned Hunt into the street and let him walk back home.

Hunt's bilious nature seems to have brought him into dispute with most of those with whom he came in contact. The following is an extract from Byron's letter to Murray, his publisher:

"I am sorry to hear of your row with Hunt; but suppose him to be exasperated by the *Quarterly* and your refusal to *deal*; and when one is angry and edits a paper I should think the temptation too strong for a literary nature, which is not always human. I can't conceive in what, and for what, he abuses you. What have you done? You are not an author, nor a politician, nor a public character; I know no scrape you have tumbled into. I am the more sorry for this, because I introduced you to Hunt, and because I believe him to be a very

good man; but till I know the particulars, I can give no opinion."

For the sake of a moment's diversion let us read what Byron wrote to Tom Moore, the Irish poet. The letter is dated April 2, 1823, about a year before Byron's death:

I have been far more persecuted than you, as you may judge by my present decadence, — for I take it that I am as low in popularity and bookselling as any writer can be. At least, so my friends assure me — blessings on their benevolence! This they attribute to Hunt; but they are wrong. It must be, partly at least, owing to myself; be it so. As to Hunt, I prefer *not* having turned him to starve in the streets to any personal honour which might have accrued from such genuine philanthropy. I really act upon principle in this matter, for we have nothing much in common; and I cannot describe to you the despairing sensation of trying to do something for a man who seems incapable or unwilling to do anything further for himself, — at least, to the purpose. It is like pulling a man out of a river who directly throws himself in again. For the last three or four years Shelley assisted, and had once actually extricated him. I have since his demise, — and even before, — done what I could: but it is not in my power to make this permanent. I want Hunt to return to England, for which I would furnish him with the means in comfort; and his situation *there*, on the whole, is bettered, by the payment of a portion of his

debts, etc.; and he would be on the spot to continue his Journal, or Journals, with his brother, who seems a sensible, plain, sturdy, and enduring person.

Byron hit the nail squarely on the head when he said that he and Hunt had nothing much in common. His remark in another letter to Moore, that he had lived "in three or four worlds," is highly significant. He lived in the world of fashion and aristocracy, then mingled with the so-called common people, and among the faster set given to dissipation and excesses. For a man to be able to associate in turn with all three of these classes and to gain and impart intimate knowledge of all of them, as Byron did, requires a remarkable degree of versatility. Little wonder that Hunt could not comprehend a nature so far above him. He appeared to be no more able to grasp Byron's real thoughts and motives than a mouse could interpret the thoughts of the lion in whose feed box he was nesting.

Hunt set another seal of condemnation upon Byron and his works because of his agnosticism; but if Hunt's Christianity was of the sort he preached and practised in his dealings with Byron, before and after his death, we may con-

gratulate Byron that he had none of it. However, let Byron speak for himself upon the matter of religion:

I once thought myself a philosopher, and talked nonsense with great decorum: I defied pain, and preached up equanimity. For some time this did very well, for no one was in *pain* for me but my friends, and none lost their patience but my hearers. At last, a fall from my horse convinced me bodily suffering was an evil; and the worst of an argument overset my maxims and my temper at the same moment: so I quitted Zeno for Aristippus, and conceive that pleasure constitutes the το καλον. In morality, I prefer Confucius to the Ten Commandments, and Socrates to St. Paul, though the two latter agree in their opinion of marriage. In religion, I favour the Catholic emancipation, but do not acknowledge the Pope; and I have refused to take the sacrament, because I do not think eating bread or drinking wine from the hand of an earthly vicar will make me an inheritor of heaven. I hold virtue, in general, or the virtues severally, to be only in the disposition, each a *feeling*, not a principle. I believe truth the prime attribute of the Deity, and death an eternal sleep, at least of the body. You have here a brief compendium of the sentiments of the *wicked* George Lord Byron; and, till I get a new suit, you will perceive I am badly clothed.

In another letter he says:

I think people can never have *enough* of religion, if

they are to have any. I incline, myself, very much to the Catholic doctrines; but if I am to write a drama, I must make my characters speak as I conceive them likely to argue. . .

I believe doubtless in God, and should be happy to be convinced of much more. If I do not at present place implicit faith in tradition and revelation of any human creed, I hope it is not from want of reverence for the Creator, but the created; and when I see a man publishing a pamphlet to prove that Mr. Pitt is risen from the dead (as was done a week ago), perfectly positive in the truth of his assertion, I must be permitted to doubt more miracles equally well tested; but the moral of Christianity is perfectly beautiful — and the very sublime of virtue — yet even there we find some of its finer precepts in the earlier axioms of the Greeks — particularly "do unto others as you would they should do unto you" — the forgiveness of injuries and more which I do not remember.

One certainly has a soul; but how it came to allow itself to be enclosed in a body is more than I can imagine. I only know if once mine gets out, I'll have a bit of a tussle before I let it get in again to that or any other.

Hunt says that when their periodical, called *The Liberal*, was launched "it was confidently expected that money would pour in upon all of us." But it failed, and the money, instead of

pouring in, poured out — out of Byron's pocket, for Hunt had nothing to lose. Again Hunt must have failed to "cross his heart" when he said that the entire blame of his failure was due to Byron's lack of the promised interest and support. As a matter of fact, Byron wrote to his friends in all directions asking their assistance. To his close friend, Tom Moore, he wrote: "Leigh Hunt is here after a voyage of eight months. . . He is setting up a Journal, to which I have promised to contribute, and in the first number *The Vision of Judgment* . . . will probably appear, with other articles. Can you give us anything? He seems sanguine about the matter, but (*entre nous*) I am not. I do not, however, like to put him out of spirits by saying so; for he is bilious and unwell. Do, pray, answer *this* letter immediately. Do send Hunt anything in prose or verse of yours, to start him handsomely — any lyrical, *irical*, or what you please." Six weeks later, in a friendly letter to Moore he said: "Hunt is sweating articles for his Journal, and both he and I think it somewhat shabby in *you* not to contribute."[1]

[1] Perhaps Moore's failure to comply accounts for Hunt's

On July 8, 1822, Byron wrote to his publisher in England: "Mr. Leigh Hunt is arrived here and thinks of commencing a periodical work, to which I shall contribute. I do not propose to you to be the publisher, because I know you to be unfriends; but all things in your care, except the volume now in press, and the manuscript purchased of Mr. Moore, can be given for this purpose according as they are wanted."

When it became certain that the magazine could not succeed under Hunt's editorship it is easy to conceive that Byron lost what little zest he had in the undertaking, in which he seems to have become a sort of silent partner, or in theatre parlance, the "angel." Shelley, who was to have been a partner in the affair, had been drowned, and besides, Byron's friends remonstrated with him and begged him to keep clear of the project, which was adding nothing to his income, but much to his list of political

spiteful remarks about him in one of the articles containing his estimates of Byron's contemporaries. He admits that he had an "ill taste" in his mouth when he got through with the anathema on Moore, which he sought to eradicate by relating a single unimportant episode that counted slightly in Moore's favor.

enemies, who, Trelawny said, "crowed" loudly over its failure. Byron offered to let Hunt have any profits to be derived from the enterprise, but Hunt was unequal to the task of making it pay. Had the Journal succeeded, Hunt alone would have profited by its success; but when it failed, Byron pocketed the loss and all the blame. It then became a question with Byron as to what to do with Hunt, who perhaps felt that he should support him and his large family indefinitely. Byron's letter to Moore shows that he wanted "Hunt to return to England," and to that end he "would furnish him with the means in comfort." This additional charity would have cost him perhaps two hundred pounds more, with no prospect of ever getting any part of it back.

The Shelleys had been endeavoring for a long time to get Hunt to come to Italy, and it was on their account rather than on Byron's that he came, though Byron furnished the money. There is nothing to show, either in the correspondence or in any claim advanced by Hunt himself, that Byron assumed any obligation whatever, except that he agreed to contribute to Hunt's periodical, which he did.

There *is* evidence in abundance to show that he did far more than he promised, in quartering Hunt and his family in his home and in advancing him, or rather giving him, money to live on. The following letter written by Byron to a friend (probably Mrs. Shelley) — whose name was withheld when it was given to the public — does not corroborate Hunt's insistent claim that he always told the truth concerning Byron's treatment of him. Perhaps no other similar number of lines that Byron ever penned gives one a better idea of his true character:

I presume that you, at least, know enough of me to be sure that I could have no intention to insult Hunt's poverty. On the contrary, I honour him for it; for I know what it is, having been as much embarrassed as ever he was, without perceiving aught in it to diminish an honourable man's self-respect. If you mean to say that, had he been a wealthy man, I would have joined in this Journal, I answer in the negative. . . I engaged in the Journal from good-will towards him, added to respect for his character, literary and personal; and no less for his political courage, as well as regret for his present circumstances: I did this in the hope that he might, with the same aid from literary friends of literary contributions (which is requisite for all journals of a mixed nature), render himself independent.

I have always treated him, in our personal intercourse, with such scrupulous delicacy, that I have forborne intruding advice which I thought might be disagreeable, lest he should impute it to what is called "taking advantage of a man's situation."

As to friendship, it is a propensity in which my genius is very limited. I do not know the *male* human being, except Lord Clare, the friend of my infancy, for whom I feel anything that deserves the name. All my others are men-of-the-world friendships. I did not even feel it for Shelley, however much I admired and esteemed him; so that you see not even vanity could bribe me into it, for, of all men, Shelley thought highest of my talents, — and, perhaps, of my disposition.

I will do my duty by my intimates, upon the principle of doing as you would be done by. I have done so, I trust, in most instances. I may be pleased with their conversation — rejoice in their success — be glad to do them service, or to receive their counsel and assistance in return. But as for friends and friendships, I have (as I already said) named the only remaining male for whom I feel anything of the kind, excepting, perhaps, Thomas Moore. I have had, and may have still, a thousand friends, as they are called in *life*, who are like one's partners in the waltz of this world — not much remembered when the ball is over, though very pleasant for the time. Habit, business, and companionship in pleasure or in pain, are links of a similar kind, and the same faith in politics is another. . .

Byron's "Waltz" with Hunt must have reminded him of the young man who on taking his partner for the waltz soon discovered that she danced only the Fisher's Hornpipe.

Hunt does not say how he got back to England, but since Shelley and Byron were both dead, and could therefore neither lend nor give him money, we may conjecture that he had some difficulty. It appears that his publisher in England had advanced him considerable money, and doubtless on his return this publisher pressed his claim for either the money or some other consideration with which to balance the account. Money he had not, nor other stock in trade, except the reputation of having been closely associated with Lord Byron, who at that time — shortly after his death — was the most talked of man in England. After his untimely death while devoting his services to the liberation of Greece, not only did he become immensely popular as a man of letters, but his name was bandied about on the tongues of the scandal-mongers, who displayed great eagerness to learn all about his mode of living in Italy. Even when Byron was living quietly in seclusion, doing the best literary work of his

career, the gossips of England had him living a riotous life of drunkenness and debauchery, with a seraglio full of mistresses and all the other concomitants of a licentious Mohammedan polygamist. No one was supposed to know the facts better than Hunt, who had lived in the same house with him, whether in the capacity of *garde de chambre* or *garde d'exterior* it did not matter, if the public could thus be let in on the secrets. It is fair to assume that Hunt's enterprising publisher saw here a chance not only to get back the money he had advanced, but to make much more; and that he proposed to Hunt that he write some racy account of Byron's life, and of the numerous mistresses he was supposed to have had.[1] Hunt, whose "peculiar ideas" seem to have singularly fitted him for such a task, agreed to undertake it, provided he could tack on his autobiography

[1] This is not a mere groundless conjecture. Hunt says: "My bookseller had pleased me by advances of money; and it was a series of circumstances connected with that liberal treatment, which finally led me to make the book what it is." Therefore as the gladiator of old entered the arena to mutilate his opponent, not because he had any personal grudge against him, but because he craved the glory of carnage, so Hunt appears to have girded himself to flay the character of a great man because he needed money.

and thus get it before the public. This he spun out to such length and breadth that the heavy burden came near sinking the ship; but his publisher managed somehow to have it cut down to 354 pages, and so put it in. It is not known what was eliminated, but what remained is certainly a paragon of dryness and stupidity, admitting of no rival in the past, and perhaps not in the future. In the beginning of the second volume, containing his autobiography, he dismisses "Mr. Dubois" in two and a half pages, "Mr. Campbell" in four pages, Theodore Hook in three pages, "Mr. Mathews" in six pages, "Messrs. James and Horace Smith" in eleven pages, and "Messrs. Fuseli Bonnycastle and Kinnaird" in as many more. He disposes of Charles Lamb in seven pages, and told all he thought worth while about Coleridge in eight pages; while the remaining 372 pages are devoted to himself and his Appendix. In the "Visit to Italy" part of his autobiography, he says in the opening lines that he had often thought a sea voyage "the dullest thing in the world, both in the experiment and the description;" but that it "might be turned to a very different account on paper, if the narrators, in-

stead of imitating the dullness of their predecessors, and recording that it was four o'clock P. M. when they passed Cape St. Vincent, and that on such and such a day they beheld a porpus or a Dutchman, would look into the interior of the floating house they inhabited, and tell us about the seamen and their modes of living," etc. When he looked into the "floating house," however, he apparently saw only the sea-sickness and distress of his own family, whence he seems to have been glad to escape to the upper deck, from which he thereafter made most of his observations, consisting chiefly of telling us the direction from which the wind blew each morning for nearly eight months, and about other equally trite routine matters, as uninteresting as they are unimportant. He appears not to have discovered anything even as interesting as a "porpus" or a "Dutchman." But when things got dull on deck he always had the wind to fall back on; even when it wasn't blowing, he could amuse himself by recording his prognostications. The wind often blew a gale, it seems, and strangely enough, during these gales "the vessel pitched and labored considerably," so considerably indeed that it almost

makes one sea-sick to read about it. If Hunt's voyage was as monotonous in the "experiment" as it is in his "description," it's a wonder that his family ever lived through it. But he at least demonstrated the correctness of his idea that in point of description, a sea voyage can be made "the dullest thing in the world."

Whether Hunt knew anything really detrimental to Byron's private character is a matter of grave doubt, but if he did he certainly concealed it. From the manner in which he handled the subject we are justified in believing that he told all he knew, and probably a great deal more. He does not relate a single fact that could impartially be construed as a valid grievance, doubtless because there was none; therefore he confined himself chiefly to mean insinuations and silly "tittle-tattle," as Mrs. Shelley called most of the published talk about Byron, and contented himself and a certain class of readers with this. After the bellicose preface the first few pages of the book are written in a rather dispassionate tone, interspersed with spleenish remarks, but as he proceeded he seems gradually to have worked himself up to the conclusion that he was really an injured

man, and in proportion as this feeling grew, in the same measure his rancor increased, until it reached a point where he became positively childish and incoherent. His feeble attempt to belittle Byron's literary fame by traducing the man himself reminds one of an ill-tempered little boy crushing a fallen acorn under his heel to spite the tree it grew on. Now and then when his vocabulary of invectives seems to have become exhausted, he wanders off apparently in a state of sheer exhaustion to other fields, or devotes himself to the restful diversion of recording detached thoughts about himself; but on these excursions he soon replenishes his stock of venom and returns again to the attack.

Although the publication went into a second edition, Hunt was vigorously assailed from all quarters, even by those who were unfriendly to Byron, and we may easily surmise that the work cost him far more in prestige than it earned him in a pecuniary way. It stands today as a monumental and almost, if not quite, unique example of puerility and ingratitude—a wholly unjustifiable attack upon a dead man by one who by force of circumstances had been

to some small extent his confidant, and to a very great extent his beneficiary. The shadow he sought to cast over Byron's fame reacted upon him like a boomerang, and while the star of Byron shines resplendent over the entire earth, that of Hunt is eclipsed by the injudicious work of his own hand.

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